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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 001439

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: UK REP ON BMENA DEVELOPMENTS, LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: UK Coordinator for Outreach to the Arab World Nick Abbott offered an update on UK coordination of BMENA activities to MEPI Regional Office Director. The four civil society components are coming together: UK organizing Transparency, U.S. Rule of Law, Bahrain Businesswomen, and hopefully Qatar committing to do Human Rights. We discussed the need to improve public outreach efforts to improve public awareness and understanding of the BMENA process. Abbott reported that the EU is struggling with Arab resistance to efforts to make reform central to the Barcelona Process as part of its tenth anniversary celebration in November. Finally, we agreed on the importance of U.S.-European coordination on policy and programming as we move forward post-elections in Lebanon. End summary.

BMENA Civil Society Components

2. MEPI Regional Office Director met June 29 with Nick Abbott, UK Coordinator for Outreach to the Arab World, who is based in Cairo and who was in Tunis for a conference. BMENA coordination was the focus of discussions. Abbott outlined the UK G8 Presidency's efforts with BMENA partners to organize activities for the four components of Civil Society activities in advance of the Bahrain Forum for the Future in November.

3. Transparency: The UK is organizing the Transparency/Governance component, using Transparency International in Germany as its implementer. They plan 2-3 events, but no dates or venues have been set yet. TI Germany is supposed to share a proposed participants list for the gatherings with HMG soon.

-- Rule of Law: Abbott said that London had been in discussions with NEA/PI and his understanding was that the U.S. would organize this component, probably using ABA as its implementor.

-- Women in Workplace: Bahrain is reportedly eager to take on this activity and the GOB has already chosen a local NGO to organize an event.

-- Human Rights: Qatar has expressed interest in taking the lead, but has not yet offered anything concrete. The UK embassy in Doha is planning to approach the GOQ officially to obtain a commitment.

4. Abbott explained that the UK plan is to have each of these four components produce some sort of workplan for future civil society efforts in these areas. At the same time, the participants in the four component activities will elect representatives to represent them at the Forum for the Future in November. These representatives will act as rapporteurs on the component activities and workplans to the Forum during the Civil Society Dialogue.

Public Awareness/Understanding of BMENA

5. We shared assessments of the recent BMENA Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) meeting in Istanbul. While the discussions were useful and the participants engaged, many of them still do not fully understand what BMENA is or how the DAD and other activities fit into it. Abbott agreed that, if the participants themselves don't understand BMENA, there is little hope that the general public has any awareness of BMENA developments. This is a pity, since there are an increasing number of activities taking place with a lot of enthusiastic participation. As a start, we discussed the need to get basic information about BMENA on paper and circulated at all upcoming meetings, including information on all the different events taking place in the BMENA context. This is essential to portraying BMENA as a dynamic process and to creating a momentum in the lead-up to the Bahrain Forum.

EU -- UK Presidency

16. Abbott did not foresee any significant change in EU positions toward the region with the UK taking over the EU Presidency in July. The big battle at the moment for the EU, he reported, is getting the Arabs to accept language placing reform at the center of the Barcelona Process for the tenth anniversary meeting in November. Abbott said that the Egyptians and others are arguing that this is not what Barcelona was about and they disagree with this transformation. The Europeans are responding, "times have changed." Abbott was hopeful the EU would overcome this resistance. If so, the Barcelona meeting could combine with a productive Forum in November to give a real shot in the arm to the status of the reform agenda in the region.

Lebanon

17. MEPI Regional Director stressed the importance of coordination between the U.S. and Europe on both policy and programming as we move ahead in the post-election phase in Lebanon. Abbott agreed, saying he was fairly confident that policy coordination is on track, but feared that donor coordination was not good. He also noted that, because of the past political situation, the UK had only focused on development assistance in the hinterlands and needed to focus now on more politically oriented programs. Abbott and the MEPI Regional Director will both be in Beirut next month. We agreed to raise the importance of coordination in our meetings there and to compare notes before departing.

HUDSON